



## TEXAS GENERAL LAND OFFICE JERRY PATTERSON, COMMISSIONER

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### MEDIA ADVISORY

## 'We might be speaking French today instead of English'

GLO symposium chance to learn about impact of La Salle's ship *La Belle* prior to Austin visit

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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AUSTIN — Putting pieces of the past together: it's what historians do.

And that's precisely what happened when a million-plus fragments were recovered from a 300-year-old shipwreck along the Texas Coast and reassembled – the subject of a session at this year's Save Texas History Symposium, sponsored by the Texas General Land Office.

Timbers, shards, artifacts, bolts, bullets, bones – and even a partially intact human brain – were what remained of a ship belonging to a famous French explorer foundational to Texas' early history.

The resurrection of *La Belle* – one of Robert LaSalle's four ships – will be the subject of a talk by state archaeology expert Dr. Jim Bruseth.

"Texas as we know it may never have existed if *La Belle* would have remained afloat," Bruseth said. "The supplies and men on board would have helped secure La Salle's colony. We might be speaking French today instead of English."

Titled "Making Waves on Land and Sea: Legends and Controversy in Texas History," the Symposium is set from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 20, at the William B. Travis Building, 1701 N. Congress Ave., in Austin (just north of the Texas Capitol).

Bruseth will be joined by historian James P. Bevill who will share information about the Texas Navy and its role in defending a newly formed nation from the Mexican fleet. Their session is from 1-2:30 p.m.

*La Belle* was one of René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle's four vessels used to explore the Gulf of Mexico and colonize the mouth of the Mississippi River. On a mission to start a French colony under the aegis of King Louis XIV, *La Belle* wrecked near present-day Matagorda Bay circa 1686. The wreck was a factor in the failure of La Salle's colony, which was largely intended as a hedge between New Spain and French land claims in North America.

For three centuries the wreckage lay untouched and unseen in the bay's concealing bog. It was discovered by Texas state archaeologists in 1995. It took more than a year to recover the more than 1 million pieces, making it one of the most ambitious archaeological projects of the 20th century, as well as one of the century's greatest finds.

*La Belle* is also the subject of an upcoming exhibit at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum. "*La Belle: The Ship That Changed History*" special exhibition is scheduled to run from Oct. 25, 2014 to May 17, 2015, and will showcase conserved hull timbers and artifacts recovered from 1995-96.

Returning to Austin for its fifth year, the 2014 Save Texas History Symposium will investigate notable and notorious characters who color Texas history.

Other speakers and subjects at the GLO's Save Texas History Symposium include:

- 1½ Carol Wilson on governors James E. "Pa" and Miriam "Ma" Ferguson;
- 1½ Dr. Thomas Hatfield on Land Commissioner, WWII vet, and A&M President James E. Rudder;
- 1½ Dr. Jerry Thompson speaking on Mexican folk hero and outlaw Juan Cortina;
- 1½ Dr. Bruce Winders, Alamo historian, on Mexican General Santa Anna;
- 1½ James L. Haley on Quanah Parker, a Native American who lived in two worlds;
- 1½ Chuck Parsons on the legendary John Wesley Hardin;
- 1½ Mike Miller on former Land Office employee, and well-known short-story writer O. Henry;
- 1½ Jeffrey Stuart Kerr on the embattled birth of Austin as capital of Texas.

The cost is \$62 per person, which includes a barbecue lunch buffet (with vegetarian option). For additional information contact James Harkins at (512) 463-3289 or [james.harkins@glo.texas.gov](mailto:james.harkins@glo.texas.gov), or D'Anne Stites at (512) 463-6740 or [danne.stites@glo.texas.gov](mailto:danne.stites@glo.texas.gov). To register online, or for further information, visit <http://www.glo.texas.gov/save-texas-history/symposium.html>. Seating is limited.

WHAT: Texas GLO's Save Texas History Symposium

WHO: Top Texas historians and history enthusiasts, brought together by the GLO

WHEN: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 20, 2014

WHERE: William B. Travis Building, 1701 N. Congress Ave., Austin

WHY: To investigate the motivational figures in Texas history, such as French explorer La Salle

COST: \$62 (lunch included)

#### MORE INFO

Bullock press release: <http://www.thestoryoftexas.com/component/content/article/44-exhibits/accordion-upcoming-exhibits/223-la-belle>